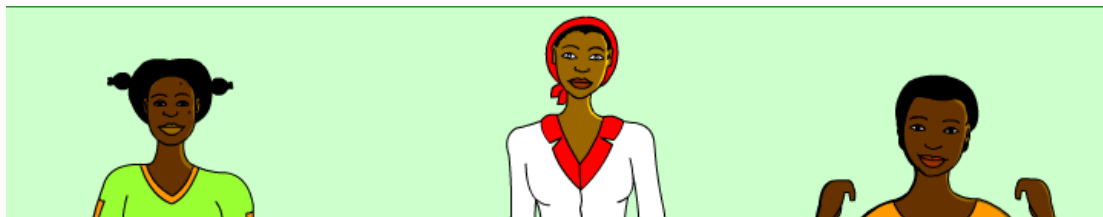


FACTSHEET: WHAT HAPPENS TO GIRLS IN PUBERTY?



Growing up.....what happens with my body?

You are now at the age of growing up. Your body and mind are changing and you will experience new feelings. We call this puberty. For most girls puberty starts when they are around 11 years old and continues until they are about 18 years old. But sometimes it starts earlier or later and takes longer or shorter. Don't worry, it's all normal.

In Puberty your body is going to change..... Let's read what is happening.

Breasts start growing

The first thing that changes about your body at puberty is that your breasts start growing. When they start to grow they can hurt. First the nipple will swell up a bit. A few weeks or months later the rest of the breast will grow as well.

Don't worry too much about the size and look of your breasts. Every girl looks different. Because the growth of your breasts continues even after your puberty years, it will not be clear yet how they will look. Sometimes the two breasts will grow at a different speed. Then you will have breasts of different sizes. This doesn't have to stay that way all your life, but if it does, it is perfectly normal.

You might want to use a bra to support your breasts. You can buy it in shops, ask your mother, sister or other older women.



Growing very fast

Your body will grow fast and soon you will notice your clothes do not fit anymore. Because girls start their puberty earlier than boys, you can look taller and older than boys of the same age. Your body does not only become taller, your hips and buttocks will get larger and wider. Your thighs will become bigger.

Hair everywhere

First some short and soft hair will appear between your legs, around your genitals. Later this hair will become dark and curly. We call this pubic hair. Hair will also start growing under your arms in your armpits. Some girls also get hair on their legs and even sometimes on their upper lip.

Sweating

You start to sweat more under your arms. That's normal. Now you have to take care of your body hygiene. So wash yourself every day and change your clothes on time.

Pimples and spots

Some young people will get pimples on their cheeks and spots on their noses. Clean your face every day and don't touch the pimples with dirty nails or hands.

All you want to know about menstrual periods

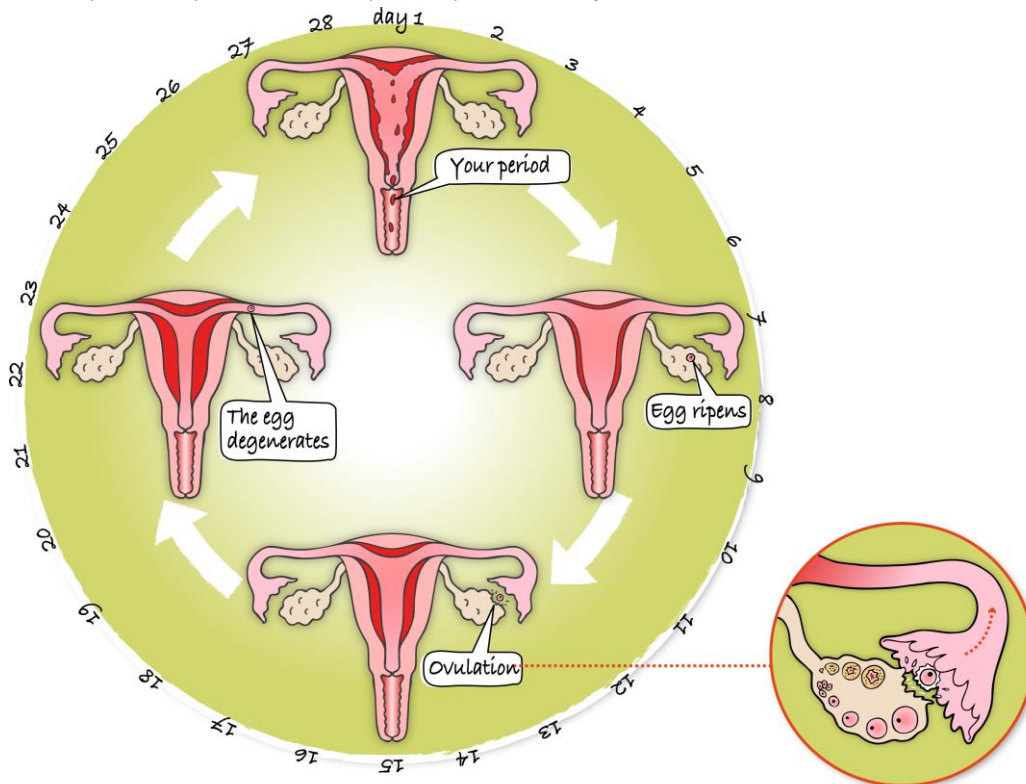
What happens?

Between the age of 10-15 every girl experiences her first menstrual period. The one of the two ovaries inside your body begins to release one egg. This happens once a month. Just before the ovary releases one egg, the uterus (the womb in the woman's belly where the baby can grow) begins to thicken its lining and collect blood in case a baby is made. If the female egg does not meet a male sperm (during or after sexual intercourse), there is not going to be a baby. Since this blood and lining is not needed it comes out of the vagina. This is called menstruation. Some girls, who do not know about periods, get frightened by this. They think they have fallen ill or something is wrong with them. But nothing is wrong, menstruation is a healthy process for every girl that is growing up.

When does it happen?

Between the age of 10-15 years most of girls will have their first period. Sometimes it happens earlier or later. Once you have had your first period, it will happen every month. But in the first two years most girls have their periods more irregularly, not every month, but sometimes twice a month or once in 2 months.

Once the period starts, the girl is losing some blood for 5-7 days. It seems a lot of blood that comes out of your body, but it usually is only one teacup in total.



Do you feel anything?

In the first days, you may feel some pain in your belly, in your back or you could have a headache. Doing some exercise can help. So does a hot bottle against your back. But you can also feel irritated or slightly depressed or sad. Fortunately, this will not take longer than one or two days.

Menstruation does not mean a girl or woman is ill or dirty. You can take a bath whenever you like and you can do and eat whatever you wish. Don't let your period disturb your life. And don't let others tell you that you should leave doing things because you have your period; you can do all the things you wish to do like cooking, walking around, going to school et cetera.

What can you do?

As soon as you find some blood in your underwear, you have to use sanitary napkins. These are available at the pharmacy or drugstore. Change your sanitary towel regularly (every 4 hours) to avoid bad smells or infections. Wash your vagina once or twice a day with water, especially during your periods. Never throw your used sanitary napkins in the toilet, since it will block the drainage.

White discharge

In the year before your first period you may spot some white discharge coming out of your vagina. This is very normal. Your body is already preparing itself for the future periods. As soon as your periods start, you will find this white discharge regularly in your underpants between two periods. Don't worry about that. It's the normal cleaning of the body. As long as it doesn't smell bad or you have a burning feeling, it is nothing to worry about.

What else is going to change during puberty and being an adolescent?

Becoming independent

In puberty your body changes as a start of adolescence. Changes happen in your behaviour as well as in your feelings. You want to become more independent. This period of becoming more autonomous and emotionally stable is called adolescence. Becoming more autonomous means you need less support from your parents and you want to spend more time with your peers. Your friends and peers become more important for you.

Uncertain/non-confident

Because you experience so many changes in and on your body, it can make you uncertain at times. You want to know how your peers look at you and you doubt if they still like you.

Mood swings

During puberty you can feel very happy at times but your mood can also change suddenly. Then you feel depressed or sad without an obvious reason. You start to reflect more on yourself, the world and other things. These mood swings are normal. During adolescence you will learn to cope with mood swings and become emotionally more stable.

Feelings of love

During puberty you can start feeling attracted to boys. You like to watch boys and think about boys. You want boys to look at you and you hope they like you. Sometimes you fall in love with a boy. You feel nervous whenever you see him and you cannot stop thinking about him. Some young people happen to be attracted to someone of the same sex. That could make you feel confused. Feelings of attraction to the opposite sex and also to the same sex are normal at your age. But you have to think carefully what to do with these feelings.

Friendly relationships with boys

There are many misconceptions about friendships with someone from the opposite sex. Friendship doesn't have to end in sexual behaviour or early marriage. Friendship with the opposite sex is possible, also during puberty. Boys and girls can learn a lot from each other as long as they treat each other as equals and respect each other's feelings and limits. In a good friendship boys and girls support each other and do not expect more. Friends protect and support each other and do not force their friend to do something against his/her will.

Sexual relationships

For many people having sex means sexual intercourse. But sex means so much more. Sex involves also feelings, thoughts, beliefs and values. Some of the sexual activities people engage in can be: holding hands, kissing, having fantasies, petting, masturbation, oral sex and sexual intercourse. And sometimes people do not act, but only fantasize about all these things. Be aware of the consequences and the impact a sexual relation can have on your life and future. Make up your mind first before acting.

Masturbation

Masturbation is a way to deal with your sexual feelings in an individual way. Many people masturbate, young and old, married and not married, , but there are also people who do not. Masturbation is NOT harmful for your health. It helps you to release sexual feelings. Masturbation is normal in every human being's life, also in puberty and there is no need to feel ashamed or guilty about it. Boys masturbate more frequently than girls. Girls have to beware of sharp nails, dirty fingers or using sharp objects as these can be harmful to their body.